

Policy Publishing in Print and on the Web

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What happens to print publishing, such as this journal, in the age of blogging? College students, faculty and staff swim for hours each day in the Internet, especially via search engines, the blogosphere and social-networking groups—perhaps more than do any other parts of society.

Indeed, college campuses live on the Internet, however good or bad this may be for developing interpersonal skills and developed thought. These inventions may be causing massive attention-deficit disorder, but the genie is out of the bottle, and we must deal with it.

Certainly, the New England Board of Higher Education must embrace this world. After all, readers in academia are probably the most “Interneted/World Wide Webbed” group of all.

So print-on-paper’s role will continue to decline. The speed, infinite space, immediate interactivity and cheapness of Internet publishing are huge competitive advantages against print-on-paper publishing.

But there are drawbacks to the Internet for academic life. Much of the stuff is put on the web unedited and rife with extreme agendas and thoughtlessness. The ease of using the Internet, and the ability to camouflage identity, encourage the transmission of error and hyperbole. This isn’t exactly healthy for the life of the mind (not that I favor censoring it).

On the other hand, the very openness and fluidity of the Internet provide for quick correction of factual errors and the presentation of much-needed countervailing arguments in response to absurd positions. Nice for students and teachers—if they can keep up with the Internet’s ever-accelerating expansion.

The virtually infinite expanse of space on the web also should be seen as a boon, in some ways, to scholars. Besides at-your-fingertips accessibility to global sources of information and analysis, it lets people consult experts directly to quickly try out ideas and then revise them.

Still, there are only 24 hours in a day, and one can easily get lost in the Internet, and especially the endlessly churning blogosphere. I wonder, watching my colleagues spending their days online, how much of that time is wasted. I’d say a lot. Indeed, some measures of productivity may be falling now because of time-wasting on

the Internet, including of course *email*, an overused tool whose volume has become so great it has become more of an inconvenience than a convenience for many people.

Using an old-fashioned library with books and periodicals on paper can be a more disciplined and orderly way to research than using the Internet. And reading and putting things on paper tends to encourage more intellectual rigor than using the attention-deficit-disordered computer world.

Further, there’s the likelihood that people reading information on paper retain it better than they do reading it on a screen. After all, even young people who have grown up on the World Wide Web print out content, especially if it’s more than a screenful.

And it has repeatedly been shown that something printed on paper has more authority than that on a screen. There is something about the gravitas of paper—the physicality of it. A major announcement hardly has weight until it goes on paper.

To save money, publications like *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION* will be tempted to go all-digital. But that would be a mistake. Certainly, blogging will be an increasingly important part of the package, but I suspect the importance of the topics discussed will mandate continuing with at least several issues a year with the validation and authority of print on paper. To think that reading a publication online is just the same as reading it on paper is just not neurologically accurate.

Enthusiastic use of the Internet can only expand a journal’s influence, but print won’t go away. The two media play related but different roles, and our journal must use both of them.

In any case, while maintaining a printed presence, *NEJHE* should create a family of blogs, written by staffers, members of the editorial advisory board and others, to report on and comment on higher education developments in the region.

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